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ABSTRACT

Drawing from national research on the demographics and level of professionalization of faculty at community colleges, this paper suggests ways in which faculty can support and promote the collegiate function of two-year institutions. First, demographic trends with respect to age, teaching load, educational attainment, gender, and ethnicity are reviewed. This section indicates that except for an increase in age and years of teaching experience, the demographics of teaching faculty were consistent between 1975 and 1984. The advance in age and increase in years of experience have implications for the transfer function. While young teachers have greater concern for students, older faculty are better able to promote and maintain policies that affect both student transfer and the essence of liberal arts in collegiate curriculum through their involvement in management functions. The next section examines indicators of faculty professionalization, including the lack of succinct, reliable, readily understood guidelines for peer review; the importance of relations and interaction with students to faculty job satisfaction; a low level of research and publication activity when contrasted with four-year college faculty; and a trend toward affiliation with professional organizations. The final sections look at ways that faculty can contribute to the college's transfer function, including: (1) taking responsibility for the academic and skills development of students planning to transfer to ensure that they can compete successfully at senior institutions; (2) helping students select a sequence of transferable courses; (3) utilizing the learning centers and media laboratories on campus to enhance instruction; (4) assuming greater responsibility for their own professional development, by conducting research, keeping abreast of new ideas in their fields, and be aware of instructional outcomes; and (5) seeking ways of taking the liberal arts into occupational areas. (MDB)

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This paper was excerpted from The Collegiate Function of Community Colleges by Arthur M. Cohen and Florence Brawer.

The Faculty Who Teach Collegiate Courses

Florence B. Brawer

The faculty are the arbiters of the curriculum. They decide on course content and level, select the textbooks, determine classroom activity patterns, write and mark the examinations, and, in general, structure the conditions of learning.

Many characteristics of the faculty affect their work: their age relates to their concern for their students; their level of graduate school preparation relates to their depth of interest in an academic discipline; their years spent in a single college are associated with their power to control the curriculum. The level of professionalization of the faculty as a whole relates to the way they effect the transmission of their disciplines, from the size of the classes they prefer to their political activities on behalf of the curriculums they espouse. This paper discusses faculty demographics, attitudes, activities, and level of professionalization. All data have been derived from studies based on colleges nationwide.

Demographics

Except for an increase in age and years of teaching experience, the demographics of the faculty teaching in community colleges were notably consistent between 1975 and 1984. Several surveys of various faculty

samples, conducted by The Center for the Study of Community Colleges, reveal the patterns. Although full-time instructors account for less than half the faculty by headcount, three-fourths of the class sections are taught by the full-timers. Their typical teaching load is between 12 and 16 hours per week. Their modal age is in the mid-40s. In 1975 their mean age in the high-30s but since few new young instructors were employed during the ensuing decade, both the mean age and tenure increased in the 1980s.

This advance in age and its corollary increase in years of experience have several implications for the collegiate function. The survey reported in detail in The Two-Year College Instructor Today (Cohen and Brawer, 1977) revealed that younger instructors had a greater concern for students -- defined as spending more time interacting with students outside class, and being more conscious of qualities they would want their students to gain. Instructors high in this construct generally tended to be involved practitioners who were also high in Functional Potential, a psychological construct measuring self-integration. Older instructors tended more to be involved with the managerial aspects of their work: committee service, community relations, professional association activities, research on teaching, and similar extra-classroom responsibilities.

This suggests that older faculty may be in a better position to promote policies that affect student transfer and to ensure that the liberal arts retain a prominent place in the curriculum. They may be able to influence other college staff members to join in organizing transfer-related activities, modifying curriculum and course entry requirements to maximize student success, and maintaining liberal arts graduation requirements. Instructors with the longest period of service,

naturally a correlate of age, seem most likely to be involved in these essential components of the collegiate function.

Approximately three-fourths of the liberal arts instructors in colleges nationwide hold the masters as their highest degree, and around one-fourth hold the doctorate. But while sizable numbers tend to earn the doctorate after employment, increasing numbers are obtaining that degree prior to or soon after their job entry. In 1975 16% of all instructors teaching courses in the humanities held doctorates. By 1983 that percentage had increased to 23 and, among instructors in all the liberal arts, to 27. At the same time, the number of instructors working toward doctoral degrees decreased from 24% to 18%. The ratio of people holding the doctorate will probably increase slightly over the next several years until the teacher shortage anticipated for the 1990s brings in a sizable cohort of new instructors without the highest degrees. At that time the ratio will stabilize at between 28 and 30 percent and remain there or slightly lower until after the end of the century.

As for gender and ethnicity, women are still more likely to be part-time instructors and less likely to hold the doctorate. Exactly two-thirds of the faculty are men. Less than ten percent are members ethnic minorities. The consistency of these ratios over the past decade suggests that affirmative action has been more form than substance. Perhaps if more new faculty had been employed during the period, the figures would have shifted.

Faculty Professionalization

A profession is an occupational group that has taken on certain characteristics: controlling entry to the group, a long period of training before a person may be allowed to enter, an element of peer

judgment or self-policing, ministering to a client population, a group in possession of a body of specialized knowledge not readily available to laypersons, formal organization, and a code of ethics. An occupational group is neither professional or unprofessional; there is a continuum of professionalization and a group's position on that continuum is measured by its exhibiting those characteristics to a greater or lesser extent.

With a few exceptions, recent studies have confirmed many earlier findings. Certification policies, set at the state level with only minor modification in local college districts, typically include a master's degree in an academic subject area and, in some cases, a stint as a teaching intern. No change has occurred in the faculty's tendencies to control entry to its ranks. And while as a group they exhibit a modest form of self-policing, they have not developed succinct, reliable, readily understood guidelines for peer review, and it is unlikely that they will do so.

The faculty does minister to clients. By definition, instructors teach, work with students individually and in groups, prepare instructional materials, make decisions on curricular modifications, and judge their clients' progress through the use of periodic measures of student learning. This is the foundation of their professional life, the one that brings them the most satisfaction, that by which they define themselves.

To most instructors, the dynamics of the classroom are the essence of their work. They value their interaction with students and scorn the reproducible media that remove them from direct association. But the idea of an institution that is supposed to be student centered creates stress. It blurs the faculty role as subject specialists and induces a

sense of personal responsibility for matters beyond their control. Some students expect their instructors to act as therapists, which impose additional demands on time and attention. Yet faculty members usually give high marks both to their students' enthusiasm for learning and to their own relations with them. If they could have "free choice in the matter," half would give more than the usual one hour or less per day to student interaction outside class.

Does the faculty have a body of specialized knowledge not readily available to laypersons? They are knowledgeable about their academic field, with some remaining current in their field, others not. Three-fourths indicate that they occasionally attend conferences or symposiums related to their teaching. Around one-third have written articles for publication; around one-fifth have authored or coauthored a published book. One-fourth of the faculty have applied for grants to study problems in their field or related to their teaching. More than half are members of disciplinary associations, such as the American Psychological Association or the American Historical Association; less than half attend the meetings; around 15% present papers. Three-fourths read discipline-related journals; three-eighths read journals in professional education.

Compared with faculty in senior institutions, these figures are low; compared with faculty in secondary schools, they are high. A more useful mode of comparison is to review the community college group's progress over time. Here the percentage of instructors publishing papers and receiving grants shows marked increase between 1975 and 1983. Much of the increase is due to the National Endowment for the Humanities' expanding the availability of grants for community college staff members. It suggests that when opportunities are there, the faculty will take advantage of them.

The faculty are tending more toward affiliation with professional organizations. Laws allowing them to bargain collectively have stimulated membership in state and national faculty organizations, including the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association. More than half the faculty belong to those groups. To sum the professionalization of the faculty, they are teachers first, members of a teaching profession second. Few of them perceive the value of aides, readers, or assistants in extending their influence on student learning. They use their collective bargaining rights first for self-interest and, in successive contract interactions, to expand their power over the curriculum. They tend to be modestly connected with their academic field, but the longer they stay in the colleges, the weaker that connection becomes. They are concerned more with their own and their students' personal development than with the societal implication of their efforts. They view teaching teaching as a solo performance, guarding unstintingly their right to the closed classroom door.

Community college instructors are relatively highly professionalized, certainly so in comparison with secondary school teachers, probably less so than university professors, but few interact regularly with their counterparts in other colleges. Most are concerned almost exclusively with their relationship with the institutions in which they work.

Helping Students Transfer

The faculty contribute to the colleges' transfer function in at least two ways. First, in their teaching role they assume the responsibility for the academic development of students who hope to transfer to senior institutions. This requires that they be sensitive to equipping

students with the skills needed to compete effectively in senior institutions.

The second way in which faculty contribute to the support of the transfer function is less easily definable for it encompasses a variety of activities. Some of these are associated with but not directly related to teaching functions while others reflect attitudes and commitment. Faculty advise students with course selection, and meet students during office hours to discuss assignments or suggest ways of improving performance. Most of the faculty are involved in these types of activities because in most institutions they are expected to commit a certain amount of time to office hours. In contrast, few instructors involve themselves in either formal or informal voluntary activities for example, student orientation sessions.

Little or no participation in activities that increase their interaction with students and with other domains of the institution may indicate that faculty influence vis-a-vis the transfer mission does not extend beyond the boundaries of the curriculum. Exposing students to a sequence of transferable courses alone is not likely to increase most students' chances of transfer. But the faculty tend to perceive transfer education, policy, and special efforts as being primarily an administrative function controlled by student services personnel. Most of them do not even agree that the colleges' primary or most important function should be activities that enhance transfer rates. More feel that life long education or occupational studies supersede transfer in importance. Few would accept the premise that the best indicator of a community college's effectiveness is the proportion of its freshmen who go on to earn the baccalaureate. Evidently, the majority of the faculty share the

philosophy espoused by the community college advocates who contend that the character of the colleges precludes programmatic priorities as well as measures of effectiveness based on graduation and transfer rates.

The Teaching Role

Most instructors believe that one cannot teach what one is not. One result of this belief system is their often subtle but sometimes overt rejection of the people who manage the learning laboratories. To the faculty at large, the only true teaching situation is one in which an instructor is in a classroom with a small group of students. Those instructors who have stepped out of that role to become managers of learning centers or media laboratories have separated themselves from the dominant faculty view in two ways: they are not in the classroom with the door closed lecturing to or conducting discussions with small groups of students; they have reduced their disciplinary connection because instead of teaching mathematics or English, they are assisting students to learn mathematics and English. The faculty have never accepted the definition of teaching as "causing learning", hence the instructors in the learning centers have become a caste apart. Those staff members may be quite expert at effecting student learning through the use of tutorials, programmed materials, small-group interaction, etc., but they are perceived as having denied their academic connections. They no longer teach content or self; all they do is teach students.

The faculty realize that community colleges have to do the most difficult jobs in higher education and they are ambiguous about the standards they hold for their students. They want to think that their courses are just like those offered in the four-year institutions but they know they are dealing with a less well qualified student body and

they feel they must help the students they have. They long for better prepared students but realize that they are not likely to see such a group in all their classes. That is why they cherish the chance to teach an honors, advanced, specialized, or second-level course in their field.

Some instructors chafe under the forced separation of research in academic disciplines from teaching and from the job itself. They may be ambivalent toward the possession of a doctorate, feeling that if they have the degree, which is supposed to evidence the ability to do research, they are not living up to their potential. Most colleges provide no intellectual rewards for publishing, no recognition for scholarship. Among the faculty as a group there may be suspicion of those who do research in an academic field, with the person's colleagues wondering why the instructor is doing research when he or she doesn't have to and when the institution does not reward it. The isolation of the community college instructors makes it difficult for them to maintain awareness of new ideas coming into their teaching field. A faculty that does not participate in academic research tends not to maintain current awareness of the products of research conducted elsewhere. A faculty that is little aware of patterns of curriculum and instruction in neighboring institutions must devise for itself any change in teaching or curricular strategies. A faculty unaware of its own outcomes finds difficulty in defending its belief in the liberal arts. A faculty unaware of trends in the liberal arts can sustain its own commitments only by appealing to tradition.

Toward Greater Involvement

The collegiate function might well be enhanced by various trends now underway and by others that might be supported. The faculty could move

toward a greater affiliation with their academic disciplines. This is an essential component so that the instructors can themselves reconceptualize those disciplines to fit the realities of the institutions in which they work. Although community college instructors cannot depend on either university professors or on their own administrators for leadership in this essential reconstruction, they can make their own contribution by translating knowledge stemming from the disciplines into forms usable by lay persons. Professional consciousness develops slowly; yet, the chances for an accelerated move toward a higher order of involvement with the collegiate function are greater now than they have been before in the history of the community college. External agencies have begun making extramural funds available for study grants. Static enrollment in the colleges has allowed the faculty to become more concerned with the students they have, as opposed to their prior frenetic rush to accommodate ever increasing numbers. Professional and disciplinary associations have sprung up; the Community College Humanities Association and the Community College Social Science Association are active in engaging their members' concern with teaching in those disciplines. And among the institutions themselves, there is a trend away from the concept of access at all costs and undifferentiated service to the community and toward the traditional mainstream activities of teaching general education, career education, and the liberal arts.

The faculty might seek ways of taking the liberal arts into the occupational areas by introducing course segments pertaining to particular career fields. They could find materials suitable for presentation to student whose main mode of information reception is through other-than-print media. They could work with community services directors in presenting short courses, lectures, and instruction in other formats to

the community at large. And they could argue for changed modes of faculty work load accounting so that such innovative presentations would become a normal part of every instructor's work.

By accentuating the collegiate function, not from a posture of defensiveness but from an understanding that collegiate programs must be maintained if the institution is going to continue its claim to comprehensiveness, the faculty can make yet another contribution. They could support studies not only for their college's effect on individual students but also on its total community. They could espouse arguments favoring the liberal arts as an essential component of acculturation for immigrants to American society, native as well as foreign born, using indigenously generated data to support their contentions. And they could help their college's research directors design and conduct studies of student flow through the institution, an essential component of the collegiate function.

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